



This is the birth of a new screen partnership ...but who put veal on the menu?

WHEN BILLY MET NORMAN

ABOVE: Billy as Mitch Robbins with Norman. Robbins delivers the calf in a key scene from *City Slickers*.

BILLY CRYSTAL looks disgusted.

"Veal? They gave you veal?" he says when he hears about the menu at dinner following the press screening of his latest film *City Slickers*.

Billy's fury has nothing to do with his own food tastes, but is more due to the fact that he shares star billing in this film with a calf named Norman, who arrives in a key scene in which Billy's character plays "midwife".

City Slickers is the story of three friends who decide to go to a Western ranch for several weeks of relaxation.

Billy plays Mitch Robbins, a family man approaching 40 with trepidation shared by his friends Ed (Bruno Kirby) and Phil (Daniel Stern). Under the guidance of real-life cowboy Curly (Jack Palance), the three face the challenges of the wild West.

Billy compares the touching scene in which Mitch helps give birth to Norman with the experience of seeing his own daughters, Jenny, 18, and Lindsay, 13, come into the world.

"I wanted to get Norman on my chest, so it would be like my babies were when I was first handed them," he says. "I wanted to feel his heartbeat the way I felt the girls' — like a hummingbird on your chest. That's what made the scene great, because it was so real."

But, in case you think the star of movies such as *Throw Momma From The Train* and *When Harry Met Sally* has gone serious on us, he quickly turns the otherwise tender scene into a comedy routine.

"I can't do it," Mitch says during the

birthing, "I fainted when my own kids were born and I wasn't even there!" Later, he tells the cow: "You really should have adopted, because you're never going to get your figure back!"

Which sounds more like the Billy Crystal the public loves.

City Slickers also marks an important point in Billy's career, as he wears the hat of executive producer and was responsible for coming up with the idea for the film.

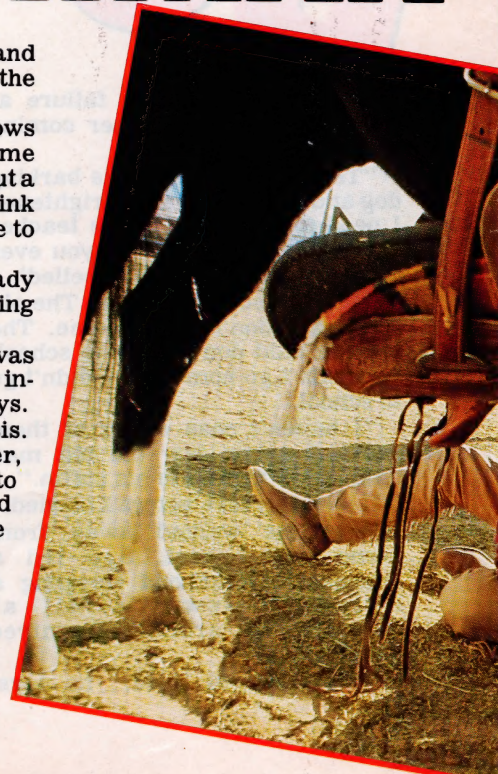
"I was watching one of those TV shows about fantasy vacations and it just came to me so fast," he recalls. "What about a cattle drive with three friends who think they're really great friends and have to find out why along the way?"

His idea paid off, as the film is already a big box-office hit in America, grossing more than \$100 million.

"After *When Harry Met Sally*, it was difficult to find something really intriguing and different to do," Billy says.

"The story touches on mid-life crisis. I created this movie and this character, so I created something that I wanted to talk about in a funny and honest and hopefully good way. I think I made what I call 'a suit of clothes' for myself for this part.

"I've gone through it and I'm still going through it (although he is happily married to his wife Janice for 21 years), but it's not a crisis as





LEFT: Billy experiences horse-riding hazards in his latest movie. The director gave the popular actor the horse as a present.

much as a confusion. I get sort of bewildered about it — wait a second — how old am I now?"

Billy, who finally remembers he is 43, could also identify with his character's total lack of cowboy skills. He was taught how to ride and rope cattle by stuntman Jerry Gatlin, who had worked with the ultimate cowboy John Wayne and declared Billy a better horseman.

"Did he say that?" Billy says. "It

must have been that \$20 I paid him!"

And, typical of many movie sets, Billy admits to a location romance while he was in Santa Fe shooting the film — with his horse, Beechnut!

"I had made a really good, mature decision to go home and live without him," Billy says of his horse.

"I thought maybe this was a location romance. But one day the director (Ron Underwood) asked to see me and I walked on the set and there was Beechy with a big ribbon around his neck and a card!"

*From Jenny Cooney
in Los Angeles*